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SUBJECT: BUILDING MOMENTUM FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY
IN CUBA - PRAISING THE EU,S NEW BENCHMARKS

¶1. (U) This is an action request. Please see paragraph 5.

¶2. (U) Summary. The European Union,s recent policy statements on Cuba provide an opportunity to discuss respect for human rights and the need for democratic change in Cuba in Western Hemisphere countries. The EU placed respect for human rights at the center of its policy, acknowledged Cuba,s democratic opposition, and renewed its commitment to promote "real progress towards pluralist democracy" in Cuba. End Summary.

¶3. (U) On June 10, the U.S.-EU Summit Declaration reaffirmed a Trans-Atlantic commitment to democracy and respect for human rights in Cuba: "We encourage democratic processes in the countries of the region consistent with the Inter-American Democratic Charter. We welcome Cuba,s signing of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and urge the government to ratify the covenant and demonstrate its commitment by unconditionally releasing all political prisoners."

¶4. (U) On June 23, the EU Council set aside "political sanctions" (restrictive measures) and offered to establish a political dialogue with the Cuban government linked to what we consider to be important human rights benchmarks: "The Council called upon the Cuban government to improve effectively the human rights situation by, inter alia, releasing unconditionally all political prisoners, including those who were detained and sentenced in 2003. This remains a key priority for the EU. It also calls upon the Cuban government to facilitate access of international humanitarian organizations to Cuban prisons. The Council further called upon the Cuban authorities to ratify and implement the recently signed International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and urged again the Cuban government to make real the commitment to human rights it has demonstrated through the signing of these two human rights covenants." In June 2009, the EU will continue its dialogue with the GOC if the EU Council decides it is effective, taking into account in particular the human rights benchmarks. The EU Council also reaffirmed its policy of contacts with Cuba,s democratic opposition.

¶5. (U) ACTION REQUESTED: Posts are encouraged to seek opportunities to discuss the EU,s policy statements with Host Governments, with human rights activists, and others as appropriate to explore ways to build international momentum in support of human rights and democratic change in Cuba. Emphasis should be placed on the common vision shared by the EU and the U.S. and link this vision to areas of commonality with the Western Hemisphere,s commitment to democracy, particularly the Inter-American Democratic Charter. Host Governments should be encouraged to use their influence with Cuba,s authorities to encourage the GOC to meet the EU,s human rights benchmarks. You are encouraged to be creative in suggesting ways Host Governments and others can broadly engage Cuban civil society. For example, some may be willing to talk with Cuba,s democratic opposition; others may be more open to approaches such as promoting university contacts with Cuba or allowing their diplomats be interviewed by independent (dissident) journalists in Cuba.

Talking Points:

-- The U.S. and the European Union share common objectives in Cuba: universal human rights and real progress towards pluralist democracy. These values are also shared in the Americas, a point underscored in the US-EU Summit statement by the specific reference to the Inter-American Democratic Charter.

-- The June 10, 2008 U.S.-EU Summit Declaration reaffirmed this Trans-Atlantic commitment by urging the Cuban government to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and demonstrate its commitment by unconditionally releasing all political prisoners.

-- Our shared goal with the European Union of the unconditional release of all political prisoners is important because it is a step that could help to create the conditions for a broad dialogue among Cubans on the island about the future of their country. This is a process the Western Hemisphere can and should support.

-- The European Union has set human rights benchmarks for its dialogue with the Cuban government, including: the unconditional release of all political prisoners; implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; freedom of information for Cubans, especially open access to the Internet; and a "dual-track approach" of meeting with Cuba,s internal democratic opposition in addition to the Cuban government.

-- We encourage your government to use your dialogue with Cuba,s authorities to reinforce the kind of principles reflected in the EU position. We hope you can encourage them to work to meet the EU,s human rights benchmarks, especially the release of political prisoners and a genuine embrace of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. These are principles upon which all democratic nations should be able to agree and could help map a path for Cuba,s eventual return to the inter-American system.

-- We also encourage you to consider creative ways you can reach out broadly to Cubans on the island and share your own democratic experience. You can help Cuba,s civil society play a constructive role in a process of change.

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